

Emergency Support Function #15 - External Affairs

Primary Department

City Manager's Office
Office of Communications

Secondary/Support Departments

Emergency Management
Fire-EMS Department
Police Department
Sheriff's Department
Roanoke City Schools
Department of Technology
Department of Social Services
The Council of Community Services
Virginia Department of Health – Roanoke Health Department
Virginia Department of Emergency Management

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – External Affairs is responsible for keeping the public informed concerning the threatened or actual emergency situation and to provide protective action guidance as appropriate to save lives and protect property.

B. Scope

To manage information during an incident so that the most up to date and correct information is used to inform the public. This emergency support function will use media reports to support the overall strategy for managing the incident. Coordinate with all agencies involved with the incident so that one message is used for public information to avoid any conflicts of released information. This emergency support function is organized into the following functional components:

1. Public Affairs
2. Community Relations
3. Legislative Affairs
4. International Affairs
5. Rumor Control

C. Policies

During an emergency the Public Information Officer will:

1. Disseminate information by appropriate means, to include any local alert systems, media outlets, cable channel, the Emergency Alert System, NOAA All-hazards radio, and the locality's website;
2. Clear news releases with the JIC/PIO before releasing them to the media;

3. Encourage news media to publish articles to increase public awareness; and
4. Will ensure information is accurate and released in a timely manner.

II. Concept of Operations

A. General

In an emergency or disaster it is important to provide timely and accurate information to the public and to the media outlets. News coverage must be monitored to ensure that accurate information is being disseminated. The City needs to be prepared to keep City Council and other legislative representatives informed.

B. Organization

1. **Public Affairs** is responsible for coordinating messages from the various agencies and establishing a Joint Information Center. Public Affairs will gather information on the incident and provide incident related information through the media and other sources to keep the public informed. Public Affairs will monitor the news coverage to ensure the accuracy of the information being disseminated. Public Affairs will handle appropriate special projects such as news conferences and press operations for incident area tours. The Public Affairs Support Annex provides additional details on responsibilities.
2. **Community Relations** will prepare an initial action plan with incident-specific guidance and objectives, at the beginning of an actual or potential incident to address community issues. They will identify and coordinate with the community leaders and neighborhood groups to assist in the rapid dissemination of information, identify unmet needs, and establish an ongoing dialogue and information exchange. The Commonwealth and FEMA deploy a joint Community Relations Team to the locality and will work with the City team to conduct these operations.
3. **Legislative Affairs** will establish contact with the state legislative and congressional offices representing the affected areas to provide information on the incident. The locality should be prepared to arrange an incident site visit for legislators and their staffs. Legislative Affairs will also respond to legislative and congressional inquiries.
4. **International Affairs**, if needed, will work with the Department of State to coordinate all matters requiring international involvement.
5. **Rumor Control**, in an attempt to ensure rumor control, all news releases will be approved by the Emergency Management Director, Coordinator, or their designees. Information that is received by the PIO that appears to be questionable or false will be verified through another source, prior to being released to the public. The verification can be return telephone calls to the information source or by having another agency or department verify the authenticity of the information. If the information cannot be verified through at least one additional source, it will not be released to the general public.

C. Actions

1. Evaluate the situation;
2. Monitor national, state, and local news coverage of the situation;

3. After coordination with the State EOC, time permitting, the PIO will begin to disseminate emergency public information via news releases to the local news media;
4. Content should be coordinated with adjacent jurisdictions and the State EOC;
5. Emphasize citizen response and protective action;
6. Develop accurate and complete information regarding incident cause, size, current situation, and resources committed;
7. Continue to keep the public informed concerning local recovery operations;
8. Assist Health Department in disseminating public health notices, if necessary;
9. Assist State and Federal officials in disseminating information concerning relief assistance; and
10. Document expenses.

D. Responsibilities

1. Primary Department

- a. Establish a working arrangement between Roanoke Valley PIOs, the City EOC and local radio stations, television stations, and newspapers;
- b. Encourage local newspapers to periodically publish general information about those specific hazards, which are most likely to occur, such as flooding, severe weather and hazardous materials accidents;
- c. Activate, staff, and coordinate Joint Information Center as needed;
- d. Prepare and provide general information as appropriate to special groups such as the visually impaired, the elderly, etc.;
- e. Coordinate with the Council of Community Services as a phone bank for citizen inquiries, rumor control, and information dissemination;
- f. Assist Health Department in disseminating public health notices;
- g. Assure the availability of back-up generators at local EAS radio stations;
- h. Arrange regular press briefings;
- i. Establish communications with State Joint Information Center;
- j. Coordinate the release of information through public broadcast channels, and written documents; and
- k. Maintain an up-to-date telephone and fax number list for all local news organizations.

2. Support Departments

a. ESF #5 (Emergency Management)

1. The Director has authority to approve all press releases;
2. The Director will be available to provide situation reports to the Mayor and City Council, as requested; and
3. The Director will be responsible for all legislative updates and congressional inquiries and may delegate as needed.

- b. Council of Community Services
 - 1. Activate #211 hotline for disaster specific related callers;
 - 2. Coordinate, provide, and maintain necessary staff to handle call volume; and
 - 3. Collect and share information with Emergency Operations Center.
- d. ESF #Fire-EMS Department
 - 1. Maintain and keep resource and situation status reports available; and
 - 2. Provide Public Education Specialist to support Joint Information Center and/ or ESF #2 as needed;
- c. ESF #13 (Public Safety & Security)
 - 1. Maintain and keep resource and situation status reports available;
 - 2. Provide information regarding Jail and inmates, as requested; and
 - 3. Provide Public Information Specialist to support Joint Information Center and/or ESF #2 as needed.
- e. Public Schools
 - 1. Maintain and keep resource and situation status reports available;
 - 2. Maintain detailed school, student, and operation conditions available; and;
 - 3. Provide Public Information Specialist to support Joint Information Center and/or ESF #2 as needed.
- f. Department of Technology
 - 1. Maintain and keep resource and situation status reports available;
 - 2. Provide technical, GIS, support and supplies as needed; and
 - 3. Provide Public Information Specialist to support Joint Information Center and/or ESF #2 as needed.
- g. Health Department
 - 1. Maintain and keep resource and situation status reports available;
 - 2. Provide Public Outreach Coordinator to support Joint Information Center and/or ESF #2 as needed.
- h. Social Services Department
 - 1. Maintain and keep resource and situation status reports available; and
 - 2. Provide Public Information Specialist to support Joint Information Center and/or ESF #2 as needed.